

teacher-researchers nor is it laden with esoteric terms. It is, however, a user-friendly handbook for aspiring teacher-researchers wishing to turn their classrooms into laboratories where teachers and students are at the heart of the research. Research has the power to transform classrooms, and it begins with inquiry. Hubbard and Power say that “inquiry has been oxygen for us” (p. 185), and they hope that such inquiry breathes life into the work of teacher-researchers giving them the chance to reinvent themselves and their work.

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## **THE NEW FAITHFUL: WHY YOUNG ADULTS ARE EMBRACING CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY**

COLLEEN CARROLL, LOYOLA PRESS, 2002.

*Reviewed by Kevin P. Kiefer*

In the book *The New Faithful*, Carroll uses an anecdotal approach to explain why many young people today choose Christian orthodoxy. The underlying premise throughout the book is that the group of young Americans at the end of Generation X (ended in 1983) is searching for a truth and meaning in life that is not provided by the current societal norms and values. In seeking this truth, young people are rejecting ethical relativism and embracing notions that are religious in nature, with God as the source of all truth. Because of this revelation, they are drawn to the religious identities and devotions that their parents rejected.

One of the first surprising comments in the book is that young adults are more likely today to hold traditional views on sexuality, such as the immorality of premarital and extramarital sex, homosexual relations, and birth control. Citing Illinois high school teacher Sue Davids, Carroll writes, “Whereas students thirty years ago fought for sexual liberation, students today have seen the dark side of free love, and they want stability” (p. 123). Carroll goes on to describe the increasing popularity of chastity and abstinence programs across the country. Virginity pledges and the True Love Waits campaign are reaching more teens than ever before. It seems that more young adults are waiting until marriage to explore their sexuality.

Young adults are finding strength from secular and postmodern persecution on college campuses by ardently defending their faith both affectively and philosophically through campus fellowships. In a post-modern society where ethical relativism is a prevailing paradigm, many college students are embracing the notion of absolute truth and engaging in apologetics with their professors and peers. To draw strength to combat relativistic instruction and dialogue, these

young adults often “gravitate . . . to groups that have a clear identity and strength of conviction. In some cases, these elements even override denominational differences” (p. 178). The battle against relativism has united some unlikely allies in a common cause to seek God and the truth.

Their faith commitment demands that young adults neither sell out nor opt out when it comes to political participation. They must participate in the political process, and even though they lean toward “the right,” Christians cannot easily identify themselves with any political party. There seems to be a movement toward identification as independents within the young Christian community. While some adults would find these young Christians, who seem to be morally conservative and socially progressive, inconsistent in their political stances, young Christians find themselves to be holding to a truth that the rest of the country may not see. These young adults say that their political philosophy is consistent. In fact, they say, it is more defensible to conform one’s political ideology to Christianity than to force Christianity into political categories. As a result, it is not possible to lump this orthodox group into either of the two mainstream political parties today.

Many young adults are bringing Christ to their workplaces and to their places of recreation, coming to know that their vocation is to evangelize where they are. Young Christians are discerning a true vocation in their work, realizing that God is calling them to be professionals in all areas, and to serve God in these capacities. They believe that, “a job is never just a job. It is an extension of their faith journey, a way for them to spread the gospel, reverence God, and promote Christian values, which often clash with those of the workplace” (p. 225). In addition, many young adults are trading in the career ladder and monetary incentives to pursue work that is more fulfilling to their vocation as disciples. The concept of sacrificing worldly success to serve Christ in their occupation is appealing to these Christians.

And somewhat surprisingly, this attitude extends into the recreational patterns of these young adults. Young adult ministry has grown extensively in the past few years. The description of a place “packed with hip young professionals sipping Corona and straining for a decent view of the small square stage in front” sounds like a scene from a concert (p. 34). However, it is a Theology on Tap meeting; it is a place where young adults come together to socialize and hear a speaker discuss issues of faith. Such events as these have allowed young adults to live their vocation in the workplace and during the after-hours socializing that in mainstream society can be a source of escapism from reality. Here, the young adults tackle reality side-by-side with recreation.

This book offers some insight for Catholic educators who work at the high school and college level. Assuming the claims of the book are true, there seems to be a resurgence of interest in faith and devotional practices. These outward signs reflect a growing movement that young people want to define themselves as Christian. With Catholic identity a growing concern in Catholic schools, teachers and principals can tap into this renewed interest in the faith and use it to re-center the focus of the school on the gospel and a life of prayer that seeks the truth.

Catholic parents may find this book interesting, not so much as an instruction manual on parenting, but as a consolation that faith is becoming important again in the lives of their children. If patterns of discontent with societal values continue, then parents can feel confident that they have a definite responsibility to pass along the faith to their children. Many parents have abdicated their responsibility of catechesis to religious education programs or to Catholic schools. However, ignoring their parental responsibilities and allowing a relativistic approach to religion seem to be counterproductive. The students interviewed in the book cite a hunger for the truth; parents should be the first ones to give this truth to their children.

This book is a fascinating read and the anecdotal approach is compelling. The stories of the young adults involved are a sign for hope for the future. However, there are some notable weaknesses in the book. The first weakness is the geographic distribution of those interviewed. The stories seem to draw heavily upon Midwest and Northeast experience. A second weakness is that while there is mention of minorities, there seems to be a glaring lack of comment on Latino youth in the country. As the Hispanic culture is the fastest growing minority group, and is largely Catholic, it seems strange that this group does not have more of a contribution to the book. The third weakness is that those who were interviewed seem to be a small population that may not be a representative cross section of young Catholics. In some sense, the book seems to focus on upper-middle class youth who do not fully represent the broad spectrum of Catholicism in the United States.

Carroll mentions the major criticism of this movement toward orthodoxy is that those who seek it are trying to escape from the real world. The response to this criticism, that these people are simply seeking the truth, could be better developed. There is a lack of theological or psychological sophistication in such a response. Finally, the title of the book is somewhat misleading as Carroll primarily draws upon the Roman Catholic tradition for her stories and research. While there is mention of other faith traditions, the crux of the book rests upon what might be termed conservative Catholicism.

In conclusion, it may be somewhat of a jump to assume that this cross section of young adults represents a large-scale movement toward orthodoxy. On the other hand, there is clear evidence that many young people are rejecting the secular relativism that their parents embraced. Perhaps Carroll is implying that young adult Christians are moving toward common ground that is still as counter-cultural today as it was after the Resurrection. If this is the case, then there is truly cause for hope and celebration of the future for Christianity in the United States.

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